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GOVERNOR BARBOUR ENDORSES ANTI-CRIME BILLS

(JACKSON, Mississippi) – Flanked by legislators, prosecutors and law enforcement officials, Governor Haley Barbour today endorsed two bills designed to toughen penalties against felons having guns or using them in commission of a crime.

Senate Bill 2470 increases the statutory maximum penalty to up to 10 years for previously convicted felons found in possession of a firearm. The current statutory maximum sentence is up to three years. The Senate sponsor of the bill is Sen. Ed Morgan, R-Hattiesburg, and the House sponsor is Rep. Jeff Smith, D-Columbus, chairman of the House Judiciary B Committee.

Senate Bill 2459 increases statutory penalty to 10 years for previously convicted felon who uses a firearm during the commission of any felony. The 10 year sentence must be consecutive to the underlying felony and can not be reduced or suspended Current statutory sentence for either convicted felon or first offender is five years. The Senate sponsor is Sen. Perry Lee, R-Mendenhall, and the House sponsor is Chairman Smith.

“I am pleased to join with these distinguished legislators, prosecutors and law enforcement in efforts to curb violent crime and protect public safety. These are aggressive, necessary steps and I look forward to the day when I can sign these new tools into law,” Governor Barbour said.

Increasing the statutory maximum for convicted felons carrying a firearm and using a firearm will give Mississippi prosecutors and law enforcement the tools to efficiently put some of our most dangerous criminals behind bars, Governor Barbour said at a Capitol press conference. He noted that persons with a prior conviction commit a majority of the violent crimes in America, according to a 2006 study by the U.S. Department of Justice showing that 56 percent of the violent felons convicted in the nation’s 75 most populous counties from 1990 through 2002 had a prior conviction record.

“All across our state, judicial dockets are overloaded and our prosecutors and law enforcement agents are overworked,” Governor Barbour said. He said prosecuting convicted felons for carrying firearms requires less law enforcement and judicial resources than prosecuting complex drug or violent crime cases.

To convict a felon of possessing a firearm, a prosecutor only has to prove two things: (1) person was previously convicted for a felony; (2) person had a gun.

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